

Runaway and Homeless Youth Training & Technical Assistance Center



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Staff Recruitment, Training, and Retention: Approaches and Strategies from the Field

The 2021 Runaway Homeless Youth National Grantee Training provided a virtual platform to discuss challenges and share emerging approaches and strategies for staff recruitment, training, and retention. These core areas, approaches, and strategies were gathered during the Regional Networking Meetings held during the national training.

Recruitment

- Partner with local WorkForce Development agencies and temp agencies that specialize in social services.
- Contact local colleges'/universities' career services and find out requirements for attending hosted job fairs, posting on job sites, and hosting internships where students receive credit for their hours worked.
- On the spot hiring is a way to boost the likelihood of keeping quality candidates. Vocalize that their hired status is dependent on requirements being met (i.e. background checks), but they are able to work while their paperwork is being processed. Doing this lowers the outcome of losing the candidate in the hiring waiting process.
- Referral bonuses incentivize current staff to recommend candidates and for new staff to stay. For example, compensating both people after the new staff has stayed beyond the probation period.
- Showcase the opportunity for leadership and advancement from the beginning, including the hiring interview. This creates a sense of longevity with the organization, and encourages leadership.
- Remain flexible with quality candidates. If they are looking for full-time work, consider combining roles/responsibilities to provide new opportunities. Vice versa, consider dividing roles/responsibilities for part time employment or offering more flexibility in hours. Offer alternatives like having a 32-36 hour work week (rather than standard 40) or create flexible shift lengths (rather than standard 8-10 hours).
- Offer positions to youth and young adults. If there are barriers such as education or age requirements, determine the reasoning behind those policies. If barriers are not serving a purpose, and moreover hindering your hiring, it may be best to let barriers go.

Retention

- Integrate fun (i.e. team songshare, birthday celebrations, and games) and promote wellness through fun team challenges (i.e. walking group and self-care challenges).
- Assess responsibilities of staff to ensure equitable and manageable workload and explore creative adjustments to work responsibilities (i.e. engage a volunteer chef to cook at the shelter so staff can focus on other things).
- Contract/partner with therapist(s) specifically to support staff (specializing in burnout, secondary trauma, etc.) and create spaces to vent safely.
- Plan an annual “staff day out” focused on relationship building, communication, and self-care.
- Regularly schedule 1:1s with staff allowing them to choose the location (i.e. park, coffee shop).
- Identify staff strengths, interests, and motivations to tailor job responsibilities around where they can best contribute to the team and program (i.e. start a music program or write small grants for a garden at the shelter). Engage direct care staff in small grant writing opportunities (local university extension office, Home Depot, private foundations, city funds, etc.) that directly tie to their work (i.e. garden at a shelter or branded swag).
- Be as transparent as possible with staff about big decisions (hiring, layoffs, raises) and why an idea might be a “no for now.”

Training

- Expand new staff training plan significantly to address increased client needs (mental health, etc.) and broaden possible candidate pool.
- Invest in more training for current staff (i.e. “Back-to-Basics: What is the role of shelter?”, “Why is our work/mission so critical, especially now?”).
- Offer cross training between roles to increase coverage options and reduce burnout.
- Connect new staff with a seasoned peer mentor.
- Encourage all staff to create a few account to the RHYTTAC eLearning Modules.

Salary + Benefits

- Provide a mental health stipend, offer mental health/self-care days, and/or contract with a therapist(s) to support staff (specialize in burnout, secondary trauma, etc.).
- Consider offering non-traditional benefits to address barriers (i.e. Uber rides/transportation support, onsite childcare, or gym membership).
- Increase hourly rates for difficult shifts (i.e. 3rd shift shelter) and consider temporary “hazard pay.”
- Combine roles/responsibilities to provide more full time opportunities.

- Offer additional paid time off (PTO) and/or flexible work hours off-site.
- Vary shift lengths (rather than standard 8-10 hours, consider 4-5 hour shifts).
- Increase hourly rates for difficult shifts (i.e. nights and weekends) and consider “hazard pay.”
- Offer tuition reimbursement or partner with a local college to participate in research/evaluation work in exchange for access to courses for staff.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Include youth and young adults in the interviewing and selection process.
- Adjust credential requirements to accurately fit the positions (i.e. is a bachelor’s or master’s degree truly needed, or is it preventing people from applying?).
- Expand non-traditional career pathways (i.e. internships from community colleges, hiring youth and young adults with lived experience, and actually paid internships).
- Acknowledge, learn, and support various religions and cultural practices/beliefs (i.e. floating holidays, or prayer spaces).

Resources and Examples from the Field

- Complete a cost-benefit analysis of transitioning to a 32 hour OR 4-day work week.
 - [Check out this article from The Adecco Group on *The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Four-Day Work Week.*](#)
- Conduct a salary study focusing specifically on mitigating racial disparity and patriarchy.
 - [Check out this article from Bloomerang about *4 Ways to Improve Salary Equity at Your Nonprofit.*](#)
 - [Read this article from the National Council of Nonprofits on *Compensation for Nonprofit Employees.*](#)
- Expand your professional development and self-care strategies to include nontraditional and diverse options.
 - [Check out this unique approach to supporting staff wellness from AYA Youth Collective in Grand Rapids, MI.](#)
- [Educate and support staff on Public Student Loan Forgiveness using these resource from Federal Student Aid.](#)
- [Make sure your staff are up to date on all FYSB Required Trainings.](#)